

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 PRS-01 SP-02 INR-07 NSC-05 EURE-00

SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 /043 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7618

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, YO

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S PRESS REMARKS

REF: STATE 190965

1. NEW YORK TIMES REPORT OF AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS, AS CONVEYED REFTEL, IS INCOMPLETE, THOUGH THAT WHICH DOES APPEAR CONTAINS ONLY MINOR INACCURACIES. THERE FOLLOWS A COMPLETE TEXT, TRANSCRIBED FROM TAPE RECORDING, OF QUESTIONS POSED BY PRESS AND AMBASSADOR'S RESPONSES AT BELGRADE AIRPORT JULY 23.

2. BEGIN QUOTE: THE AMBASSADOR: I CANNOT TELL YOU ALL OF WHAT HE TOLD ME, AT HIS OWN REQUEST. HE DOES HAVE, OF COURSE, CONTINUING RELATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY, SISTERS AND SO FORTH.

Q: IS HE WORRIED ABOUT THEM, MR. AMBASSADOR?

A: I DO NOT WANT TO COMMENT ON THAT. I CANNOT TELL YOU ALL OF WHAT HE TOLD ME, AT HIS OWN REQUEST. HE IS NO MORE A SPY OF ANY KIND THAN MY AUNT MATILDA, OR MY TEN YEAR OLD DAUGHTER. AS FAR AS I AM CONCERNED I HAVE ALWAYS FELT--AND I AM RE-DOUBLED IN THAT CONVICTION AFTER TALKING WITH HIM-- THAT HE IS AS INNOCENT AS THE DRIVEN SNOW.

NOW LET ME SAY A COUPLE MORE THINGS. AS IS NO SECRET, I HAVE HAD MY DISPUTES WITH THE EAST EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE
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STATE DEPARTMENT CONCERNING THIS CASE. I HAVE ALWAYS

FELT, AND, INCIDENTALLY, AFTER TALKING WITH HIM FEEL EVEN MORE STRONGLY, THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OWES COMPLETE SUPPORT TO ITS CITIZENS IN SITUATIONS LIKE THIS. I KNOW THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY FEEL THE SAME WAY. WHEN WE GET TO THE POINT WHERE WE DON'T CARE ABOUT AN AMERICAN CITIZEN INNOCENTLY IMPRISONED, THEN WE'RE NOT MUCH OF A COUNTRY ANY MORE.

IT WAS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO GET PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY TO UNDERSTAND WHY WE CARED SO MUCH ABOUT LASZLO TOTH.

OFTEN I WAS ASKED "HOW CAN YOU CARE SO MUCH ABOUT THIS MAN?" AND I MUST SAY IT WAS DIFFICULT SOMETIMES TO CONVINCE THE EAST EUROPEAN SECTION IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF THE SAME THING. AND IT WAS ON OCCASION MENTIONED THAT HE WAS ONLY A RECENT CITIZEN, THAT HE ONLY BECAME A CITIZEN IN 1973. WELL, TO PEOPLE WHO ASK THAT QUESTION, I REFER THEM TO HENRY GRUNWALD'S PIECE IN TIME MAGAZINE ON THE BICENTENNIAL, ON LOVING AMERICA. AS FAR AS I AM CONCERNED THE FACT THAT HE BECAME A CITIZEN IN 1973, EMIGRATED TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1967, DOES NOT MAKE HIM ONE BIT LESS PRECIOUS THAN ANY OTHER AMERICAN.

AND AFTER TALKING WITH HIM I AM DAMMED PROUD THAT HE IS AN AMERICAN.

NOW I WAS CRITICIZED BY THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION FOR BEING TOO ZEALOUS IN THIS. THEY SAID I WAS UNDIPLO-MATIC FOR PRESSING THE CASE AS HARD AS I DID. AND TO THESE PEOPLE, DIPLOMACY APPARENTLY IS THE PASSIVE PURSUIT OF AMERICAN INTERESTS AND I DON'T ACCEPT THAT.

I WAS CRITICIZED FOR PERMITTING THE PRESS TO HAVE INFORMATION ON THIS CASE FOR MY DISCUSSIONS AT YOUR REQUEST BACK LAST DECEMBER.

AND I WAS CRITICIZED, FOR REFERRING TO IT, IN A SPEECH AT BLEED, BY OUR OWN PEOPLE IN THE EAST EUROPEAN SECTION IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT. AND AS I HAVE INDICATED, NOT ONLY DO I FEEL JUSTIFIED, I THINK THAT THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OWES THAT KIND OF SUPPORT TO ANY AMERICAN CITIZEN.

Q: MR. AMBASSADOR HAVE YOU GOTTEN ANY SUPPORT IN WASHINGTON FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF TOTH?

A: YES, AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE SECRETARY TOLD ME THAT THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION ASKED THAT I BE REPRIMANDED FOR MY EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF TOTH, AND HE TURNED THEM DOWN.

Q: WHEN WAS THAT?

A: WHEN I MET HIM IN PARIS.

Q: SO THE SECRETARY PERSONALLY SUPPORTS YOUR EFFORTS?

A: SO HE TOLD ME.

Q: DO YOU FEEL THAT THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE ANY FURTHER REPERCUSSIONS TO THIS CASE, EITHER WITH THE BELGRADE GOVERNMENT OR AT HOME?

A: WELL, AS FAR AS I AM CONCERNED THE RELEASE OF TOTH BY THE YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT IS A RECOGNITION ON THEIR PART THAT WE DO CARE DEEPLY ABOUT A CAPRICIOUS IMPRISONMENT OF AN AMERICAN. AND I THINK THAT IS ALL TO THE GOOD IN TERMS OF BUILDING AND SOLIDIFYING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YUGOSLAVIA. THEY MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IN OUR VITAL INTEREST. AND THE WELL-BEING OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN IS IN OUR VITAL INTEREST. AND I THINK THEY DO UNDERSTAND IT NOW. SO I FEEL, WITH THE RELEASE OF TOTH, THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THIS COUNTRY ARE BETTER AND INDEED I WOULD SAY THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THIS COUNTRY ARE BASED ON CERTAIN FUNDAMENTAL, LONG-TERM COMMON INTERESTS.

Q: WILL YOU HAVE PARTICULAR CONTACTS WITH THE YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT TODAY ON THE CASE?

A: I WILL BE HAVING CONTACTS WITH THE YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT TODAY IN MY MEETINGS WITH GOVERNOR SCRANTON, AND WE HAVE A NUMBER OF OTHER MATTERS TO DISCUSS. I DO NOT THINK IT IS NECESSARY TO DISCUSS THE TOTH CASE WITH THEM ANY MORE. THEY KNOW HOW I FEEL.

Q: MR. AMBASSADOR, DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR CHAMPIONING THE TOTH CASE LIKE THIS WILL ACT AS A DETERRENT TO OTHER SUCH CASES TURNING UP?

A: WELL, ONE CAN NEVER TELL. BUT AS I SAID EARLIER, I LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THINK THEY CLEARLY UNDERSTAND HOW STRONGLY WE FEEL ABOUT AN AMERICAN CITIZEN.

Q: IF NOT FOR YOUR RELENTLESS INTERVENTION ON BEHALF OF TOTH DO YOU THINK THAT THE YUGOSLAVS WOULD HAVE JUST LET HIM STAY IN JAIL FOR SEVEN YEARS?

A: I CAN'T SPECULATE ON THAT. YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK THE YUGOSLAVS.

Q: WOULD IT BE UNFAIR TO CHARACTERIZE IT AS RELENTLESS INTEVENTION?

A: I WROTE HIS WIFE SOME TIME AGO THAT THERE WAS NO ISSUE-- ALMOST A YEAR AGO, NO SIX, SEVEN MONTHS AGO--THAT THERE

WAS NO ISSUE THAT I WAS INVOLVED IN THAT I REGARDED AS MORE IMPORTANT. AND I MEAN THAT, AND WISH YOU ALL WOULD HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO TALK WITH HIM FOR A GREATER (PERIOD OF) TIME. LOWELL (NOTE: LOWELL FLEISCHER, CHIEF, CONSULAR SECTION) AND I HAD THAT CHANCE.

Q: WHY DO YOU THINK THEY JUST PICKED HIM?

A: WELL, YOU ASKED HIM?

Q: WELL, WE ASKED HIM AND HE DOES NOT KNOW...

A: I GUESS NO ONE KNOWS THE ANSWER.

Q: WHY JUST HIM, THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT, OR MORE INTELLIGENT, OR...?

A: YOU KNOW IT IS EVEN CONCEIVABLE THAT THEY MADE A MISTAKE.

Q: POSSIBLE.

Q: WAS THERE ANY QUESTION THAT IT WAS AT SOMETIME FELT NECESSARY TO HAVE AN AMERICAN ACCUSED OF SPYING IN CASE SOME OTHER NATIONALITY WAS ACCUSED OF SPYING, AND IN RELEASING ONE, TO ACHIEVE A BALANCE THAT IT MIGHT BE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HELPFUL TO RELEASE THE OTHER?

A: I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT ANY GOVERNMENT WOULD BE THAT CYNICAL.

Q: THANK YOU, MR. AMBASSADOR. END QUOTE.
SWEITZER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BELGRA05084
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760298-1132
From: BELGRADE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760894/aaaadein.tel
Line Count: 209
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 STATE 190965
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AMBASSADOR'S PRESS REMARKS
TAGS: PFOR, YO, US, (SILBERMAN, LAURENCE H)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006